The Self as Transmediated Story: Examining Performance and Identity On A Life Storytelling Social Media Site

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Introduction

We are the stories we tell ourselves and each other. That is a prominent theory in personality psychology (Bruner, 1983; McAdams, 1985; 2001), one that has found complementary frameworks in communication, linguistics, sociology, qualitative research methodology, among others (Fisher, 1985; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Bertaux & Kohli, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1991). In addition, it is commonly held that our stories do not live inside of us vacuum-packed from the influences of the world (Adler & McAdams, 2007). The way in which we negotiate those stories with both loved ones and strangers plays a critical role in how we integrate our identity across multiple social contexts. As a result, it has now widely accepted that personal stories "are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned" (Rosenwald & Ochenberg, 1992, p. 1).

However, the majority of research that has led to this understanding has occurred in the offline world, either through experiments, interviews, or observations of geography-based social systems (e.g. Pasupathi & Rich, 2005; McAdams, 2001; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). In the proposed study, the aim is to understand the social dynamics of people while sharing life stories on a social media site, especially an open site, so that anyone can see the posts at any time. Examples of open sites are Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr and, to a lesser degree, Facebook.

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Communication context on such a site-who reads it, how they react, what they will assume from the story-is largely unknown to the storyteller.

In 2014, the number of people who used some form of social media around the world crossed the 2 billion mark (Kemp, 2014). While most of the content created by these users could be considered "lifelogging" (Bell & Gemmell, 2010) (small, quick, quotidian posts in multiple media formats), the affordance to tell a story, "complete with setting, scenes, character, plot and theme" (McAdams, 2001), is available on nearly all social media sites. At the same time, a significant portion of humanity is transforming into, according to Elwell (2014), "trasmediated selves", or people for whom online and offline identities are blurring to the point of indistinction. This change has naturally led some scholars (Page, 2010; Poletti & Rak, 2014) to consider how autobiography and digital media have affected and will affect each other. Some of the early studies (e.g. Page, 2010; Marcus, 2013) examined social media's affordances for life stories and narrative, while others (e.g. Malin, Vine, Stanton, Cannava, Bodie, & Pennebaker, 2014) examined whether life narrative themes (developed through psychology studies) are common in public life storytelling sites.

With this study I intend to quantitatively examine the themes that emerge when users are promoted to tell stories (rather than to simply "update" their lives). I chose to use the Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) (Altheide, 1987) of life storytelling performance on a now-defunct public social media site, cowbird.com, which prompted users to "Tell a Story" and is branded "A Witness to Life" (Cowbird, 2015). To begin with, I start reviewing the literature around life story as identity, transmediated self and online performance; then, I offer a reflexive description of the data analyses using ECA, describe the findings, and finally give suggestions on new perspectives on life storytelling across social media.

The Transmediated Self

To understand the holistic concept of the self as transmediated story, we must first understand the parts. This study is based on three inter-connected frameworks to examine storytelling in Cowbird: 1) life story as identity; 2) "transmediated self", or the blurring of offline and online life; 3) performance of narrativity in digital spaces.

Life story as identity and autobiographical memory

Growing from the work of Erikson, Piaget, Bruner, Foucault and others, the concept of the human as a storied being found its footing in the 1980s with Bruner's (1983) narrative construction of reality, Fisher's (1985; 1987) narrative paradigm, and, most importantly for this research, McAdams' (1985) life story as an identity model. This study largely draws from Erikson's (1958) identity theory, which argues that we connect past memories to the present self through stages of development, and Murray's (1938) personological approach to psychology, which considers the whole person.

From his perspective, McAdams (1985) claims that "It is a story which has the power to tie together past, present and future in [one's] own life" (pp. 17-18). This "story", as McAdams conceives it, takes two forms: 1) An overarching narrative that is revised and updated as new experiences and perspectives arise and; 2) The significant life experiences that are formed into stories and recalled to impact the larger narrative. McAdams considers that we can better understand an individual's own sense of self by identifying themes his/her individual's stories, which represent psychological outlooks on life events. Those stories can be redemptive (bad to good) or contaminated (good to bad); authors can emphasize agency (self-empowerment) or communion (belonging). Different views play a key role in who we think we are and who we can become in the future.

At the same time, there are important detractors from this line of narrative identity theory. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008), self-identified as "small story" theorists, maintain that identity does not derive from these overarching narratives (which they term "big stories"), but rather from small day-to-day interactions, conversations and quotidian moments that are socially negotiated into a constantly iterative self-identity. The authors write:

> Narratives, in this kind of approach, are focused upon not as tools for reflecting on (chunks of) lives but as constructive means that are functional in the creation of characters in space and time, which in turn are instrumental for the creation of positions visàvis coconversationalists (2008, p. 2).

By the "creation of positions", these researchers mean we take on certain roles when we communicate which continuously iterate into a

consolidated identity: a unified sense of self is born through the roles we assume in multiple conversations. They claim this is a more authentic approach to identity formation, as it accrues into a sense of self, rather than being "shaped" by the acceptance and rejection of events as they pertain to identity. Both "big" and "small" story theorists agree that interaction with others plays a key role in integrating an identity. On one hand, through an offline experiment, Pasupathi and Rich (2005) found that both attentive agreement and disagreement with a personal story reinforced that story's role in the teller's identity. On the other hand, when the receiver was inattentive, the teller was less likely to integrate the story. So, the key question that arises from this research is: what, if anything, constitutes online "inattentiveness"? That question is better framed in the next section.

Transmediated self

Based on the transmedia scholars who theorize and study the dispersion and engagement of media across multiple platforms, Elwell (2014) reflects that:

> In this 'Internet of Life', the question of digital/analog interface, 'the place where you end and the technology begins' (Praiser, 2011, p. 13) becomes increasingly meaningless as both are folded into the expanding 'in-betweenness' [and] identity itself becomes a porous membrane between the digital and the analog (2014, p. 244).

This membrane is not simply a matter of being online one minute and offline the next, according to Elwell: it fundamentally changes the way we construct the self, because others add to our persona through interaction. The question is whether such augmentation is desired, or even purposeful. In attempting to connect through those social media sites, a digital persona grows through both quotidian social activities (updates, selfies, check-ins) and larger reflections or stories, both of which are engaged by other users. One might adopt the concept of the "like economy" (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013), which values content according to social button activity, based on algorithms that deem certain content as important from social activity, but also impacts people's perceptions of the content itself. Whether and how it affects the creators of the content is a matter to consider, along with the online performance of the self.

Online performance of narrative

As adaptive creatures, it is logical that most human beings "act out" an engageable self during social interactions rather than mindlessly doing whatever they wish. Goffman (1959) explains that we perform the self to others in order to manage a desired impression: "I [use] the term 'performance' to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (p. 123).

People hide and filter personality types in order to present a desirable identity in any given interaction. At the same time, we are encumbered by culture with certain roles that are implied on us since our early stages (Butler, 1997), and later become known as "natural" aspects of the self. This identity is limited by the embodiment of the place and situation and by the roles forged and reinforced in social interactions, recalling the primary argument of the small story theorists, who recommend researching these types of interaction to illuminate how identity is constructed across multiple interactions.

Boyd's (2008) concept on context collapse is evident when "the lack of spatial, social, and temporal boundaries makes it difficult to maintain distinct social contexts", as an example of "networked publics" (p. 34). Every day, people must contend with contexts that keep colliding with each other, not just within a certain platform while engaging with certain people, but across platforms (easily searched and replicated), facing unintended potential audiences; thus, the transmediation of the stories' self is underway. Whether networked publics must demonstrate great agency to tell their stories in easily accessible locations or not, it is worth considering how social network developers and content creators better position themselves across their social spaces.

Within this framework, I sought to examine the quality of "transmediation" of the self –from offline to online persona. To do so, one critical assumption is hopefully sufficient due to its open-endedness: an offline human being is behind the texts I examine on Cowbird. I say open-ended, because even if an examined post was generated by a bot (an increasingly important possibility in social media, but less likely for these types of posts), the bot developer coded it with certain assumptions of how to tell a story. With that caveat, I guided my research with the following questions:

- What traditional (and non-traditional) performance narrative forms can be noted when users of a public social media site are prompted to "Tell a Story" about their lives?
- Does social interaction on Cowbird affect future user storytelling decisions?

Methods

Setting

Cowbird.com is a site where an explicit prompt and a well-considered set of affordances specifically evoke personal narratives. In addition to the prompts mentioned above, it is notable for its consistent taxonomy, such as when collected stories are called "Sagas". Equally explicit is the sense that this type of creation and consumption leads to community, observable when the term "user" is replaced by "People" on Cowbird, and recent joiners are called "Newcomers". While the latter are prompted to choose "Roles" (e.g. Writer, Friend, Artist, Student) during and after registration, those who pay $5 per month become "Citizens".

In the *about* section, the developers confirm that premise: "We've designed Cowbird to reflect the basic truths that all human lives are interconnected, that great stories can come from anywhere, and that we can learn a lot from each other, once we make the time to listen" (Cowbird, 2015). By examining the language that Cowbird developers used to describe the site, it is possible to determine that they place as much emphasis on community as they do on storytelling, and that both concepts are often inter-related. Statements such as "A warm and welcoming environment for storytelling"; "A global community of storytellers"; "A public library of human experience", conflate the act of life-sharing and community-building.

The social engagement cues also prime users to think in terms of intimacy and story-sharing: rather than the "Like" of Facebook, users "Love" a story; rather than "Retweet", users can share another's story by "Retelling", and they can also comment. All of these interactions, including the number of views, are publicly shared right along the story's all-screen photo, which then slides into the story. Authors can also tag their story with themes and locations, post data about the moment the

story occurred, or dedicate the story to a person (either a member or non-member).

In addition to the well-defined prompts, it is also clarified that all stories, once published, are public for anyone on the Internet. Founded in 2011 (Finn, 2011), Cowbird reported that it had registered 44.540 "authors" who had generated 80.157 stories, 784.340 loves (similar to Facebook likes) and 84.870 comments by April 20, 2015. These are relatively small numbers in social media site terms, but a large enough community to observe the emergence of culture and content around life storytelling. Cowbird's most active year of adoption was 2012, after its first year of existence and when it received generous press coverage.

Data collection

The chosen unit of analysis was a complete story posted on the site (N =120), published on 2012 and selected through simple random sampling, using the range number given by Cowbird to each story. After performing a non-scientific statistical content analysis of the data, it became clear there were a variety of content types, including forms (prose, poetry, combination), media (text and audio), gender representation (male, female, non-identified), narrative and non-narrative arc, stories about oneself, family members, friends and strangers. In one instance, a set of data from one author was added, so as to exhibit an example of content strategy (form used, topic choice) after producing a story that was highly engaged socially.

Analysis

As Altheide (1987) points out, Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) is substantively different from Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA) in several important ways. While QCA is employed to "verify or confirm hypothesized relationships" (1987, p. 68), ECA methods are used to "document and understand the communication of meaning" (p. 68), as well as to verify both quantitative and qualitative research findings. This is important since, as Kracauer (1952) mentions, QCA runs the risk of inaccuracy because "complex direction continuum into relatively elementary scales inevitably invites simplifications apt to blur the picture" (Altheide, 1987, p. 632). Looking for complexities beyond quantification seems to be a useful means for alleviating such concerns. Altheide describes ECA

as seeking "human beings engaged in meaningful behavior" (1987, p. 66), situated in a digital culture where a general sense of that behavior is supposed and expected.

By looking at the question of how human experience becomes content, the goal is more than a mere quantification: it is to consider the connection between offline life and online sharing. Is there any meaning implied in sharing offline stories? Is there a "writerly" nature to certain types of stories, or subtleties in subtext that only a qualitative approach could capture, as well as the reactions? Do certain community members, for instance, advocate for types of stories through engagement? These were the analytic questions that drove this research.

While Altheide considers eca as "reflexive movement" through concept development, data collection, coding and analysis, as well as interpretation, Sosnowy (2014) adds that while typical content analysis is linear and step-wise, ECA is reflexive and circular. To follow those guidelines, the following steps were taken:

1   Perform data analyses (through a priori statistical coding) of manifest data (Views, Comments, Retellings, Loves), normative conventions (Gender, First-person narrator, Main character, Writing Form), and theoretical descriptions (Narrative Structure, Contamination, Redemption).

2   Use statistics as a guide to re-examine stories that were coded in relevant ways. For example, depending on how rare the redemptive story was, I chose to observe whether there was something particularly self-revealing about it and whether it received more or less social engagement (loves, comments, retellings).

3   Develop inductive codes through the re-examination process. Another example of number 2 was the reflexive observation of narrative arc vs. non-narrative arc, which led to a set of codes regarding rhetorical strategies and forms: Informal, Formal, Narrative, Diary, Essay, Vignette, Photo reference, Quip and Letter. I also chose to follow one author from within to outside of my data set when I noticed that a story received a social engagement well above the norm, in order to observe whether the author attempted to replicate success.

4   Mark specific stories as highly representative examples. Rather than finding the extraordinary data for display, I noted when a certain piece efficiently represented a larger theme within the codes.

The codes employed in this study reflect the research areas: themes of redemption and contamination; genre forms; narrative construction, non-narrative construction, use of first-person pronoun of author, main character; informal language, formal language; social engagement and performativity after highly engaged content production.

Reflexivity

As a teacher of life story writing for more than a decade and after many years noting what forms the stories tend to adopt, I have a more than casual interest in how life storytelling transfers into digital space. Additionally, as a social constructivist, I believe that the interaction between author/reader is a critical juncture where a life story`s meaning is made. This is also largely supported by life story theories and studies that show how reactions to our stories affect the way we integrate them into our lives. As a longtime Internet and social media user, I sustain that digital life is a real and powerful presence for a significant number of people. This, too, will inform my interpretations of the users.

Findings

As mentioned above, the outcomes begin with the coding results, after using simple presence or no presence quantification of a priori codes. I then look specifically at common characteristics of key findings, based on the research questions: life story as identity (redemptive and contaminated themes); forms of writing and rhetorical strategies; social engagement around the stories and one example of how such engagement might have impacted subsequent content strategies.

Descriptive statistics

A descriptive quantitative data content analysis was executed to understand some primary elements of the stories. I generated a list of descriptive statistics gathered about the writers, as well as what was quantitatively seen in their data. Using SPSS, the following descriptive statistics were generated (Table 1):

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of content and engagement

Attribute	Counts
Gender	Male = 75; Female = 49; Not Identified = 12
Writing Form	Prose = 98; Poetry = 36; Combination = 2
Narrative Structure	Narrative Arc = 72; Non-narrative arc = 64
Narration mentions "I"	Yes = 107; No = 28
Main Character/Focus	Self = 98; Family = 1; Friend = 1; Other/Stranger = 35
Coded for contamination theme (good to bad)	Yes = 19; No = 117
Coded for Redemption theme (bad to good)	Yes = 13; No = 123
Views	Mean = 243; Median = 36
Comments	Mean = .24; Median = 0
Retellings	Mean = 2.77; Median = 0
Loves	Mean = 14.78; Median = 6

Source: Author.

The choice of narrative arc as a form (72 stories, Table 1) *versus* not using a narrative arc (64 stories, Table 1) was almost split in half, which shows that the prompt "tell a story" did not lead to a clear alignment with a classical definition. It was also evident that many different writing forms were used, especially a good number of poetry, even though the writing form did not restrict the choices of narrativity (Table 2). Using poetry or prose did not determine whether a narrative arc was found (refer to the poem about the tree above) or whether the language was formal or informal. It becomes clear that the exigency for the authors is more an act of self-expression rather than a prescribed method of storytelling. The more dominant aspect of the performance, which appears in the descriptive statistics, is the insertion of the self by the author. Both the use of "I" by the narrator (107 times, Table 1) and the self as the main character (98 times, Table 1) show Cowbird users were enacting a persona's presence through their writings and recordings.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of forms

	Prose	Poetry
Informal	X	X
Formal	X	X
Narrative	X	X
Diary	X	
Essay	X	
Vignette	X	X
Photo reference	X	X
Quip	X	X
Letter	X	X

Source: Author.

A common form found on the site is the direct speech, both in formalist "writerly" mode as well as more casual, conversational mode. Many of these stories might fall into the category of "wisdom literature", or practical philosophy with attempts at life insight, often with implied meanings in the text. For example:

> Those three words try to convey all the emotion and depth in the world, but they cannot. They cannot reach down in the depths of souls and heart of man to unleash all the care and concern one has for another. It cannot reach into my gut to move my mouth for me and say all the words that I didn't even know existed. Believe me when I said I tried. Love can only be expressed through action, through guttural moans, sighs, and movements, the two becoming one. Even then it can only explain so much, just one face of love. But there are many faces and I expect to meet all of them (Cowbird, 2015).

Along these lines, the most identifiable distinction would be whether the author is trying to "write" or to "speak", both which seem to be rhetorical strategies to connect with the unnamed audience that can only appear through engagement.

By "writing" I mean classical rhetorical moves, with scene-setting and both internal and external phenomena descriptions, as well as formal sentence structure. One example would be:

> My mother kept cookies in her bedside table, store brand chocolate chips and M&M chips, chocolate grahams, and in the past few years,

Vienna Fingers for my husband, Bill, fourth drawer down in the little bedside dresser she got in college. First drawer- calendar book, emery board, scissors, little Calvert School flashlight key-ring with the key to the lock box, second drawer- tv paper and remote, third- socks now, in earlier years, stockings (Cowbird, 2015).

Where the story displays both the writerly style in the grammatical sense, and the writerly strategy of creating distinct images in the reader's mind to "transport" them to a particular time and place.

By speaking, I mean conversational tones, less descriptions and more direct speech towards an audience or a specific person. This could take the form of a letter, a reference to the posted photograph and sometimes by referring events from the news, very much like a Facebook post. It is also common that authors write about Cowbird itself, attempting to establish connections with a larger audience. This is equally significant, because it usually implies readership, which reduces the uncertainty of the author's motives for being on Cowbird –it is to commune, not just perform. One example:

I am unnerved again and again by the way Ray Neighbor anticipates my thoughts and story themes in Cowbird. Here's a perfect example; this isn't about the same topic, but I have the same perceptions of the writings of others, and of the possible ways in which Cowbird.com enables us to interact. Like Ray, I have found that "love", as the sole form of address open to me, short of accessing a writer's bio for their email address and using that, simple approval is somewhat misrepresented by the word "love" (Cowbird, 2015).

The writing addresses the audience as fellow readers and writers, and places any potential reader in the digital space itself, not transporting but instead engaging them. It is also important to notice the use of "I" and "my" in each of the examples. While both authors are referring their own experiences, the first story, slightly more formal, only mentions the self once, thus "moving" toward the backstage in favor of the scene. The second approach, more conversational, uses I numerous times, "moving" toward the front of the stage, emphasizing presence.

What is most consistent across these numerous techniques is the insertion of the self for the purpose of connection. This is largely the goal that Cowbird primes and, while the traditional model of "story"

is not always the means by which users achieve this, it is clear they are attempting connection via a movement from the offline self (past or present) to the online self by multiple means.

Social engagement

So how are these writers to know what resonates with their online community? The first notable metric is simply being "seen", measured by their number of views. Here, we see that the large difference between the mean (243, Table 1) and the Median (36, Table 1) shows that attention is distributed unevenly. As a writer in a social space, to understand that there is an economy even here, one must decide to perform certain strategies to gain more attention or choose to look inward for a genuine rendering of the self, hoping to find smaller, but authentic connections.

Beyond views, a "Love" (Table 1) is by far the most common form of social engagement in the data set, likely because "Love" is a well-understood reference to the Facebook "Like", which has transcended a simple affordance and carries a certain sociological meaning (Rogers, 2012). So, when people "Love" a story, they are sending a message of approval. At the same time, "Love" is the lowest barrier to onsite engagement. A comment, even the shortest and most cursory, takes a certain amount of thought before executing a meaningful response. "Love" can only be construed as positive, a low-commitment sign of agreement, approval, acceptance.

Despite this, even "Love" is used rather judiciously in the Cowbird space, with the media number of "Loves" representing just over 16 percent of the median views. The reasons are what we might call frugality, following Rogers' like economy, and it is worth researching this on Cowbird and in other sites through interviews and, perhaps, experiments.

If we have established that much of the writing on Cowbird is performative, or the transmediated self in a public-private negotiation in a collapsed context, then the question of the meaning of social activity is a compelling one. To begin with, I tracked one writer who had a higher-than-normal social response (both the overall data set mean, as well as the authors' mean loves, views, comments and retellings.) Below is a matrix describing the highly popular posts and subsequent publications (Table 3). The rhetorical approach is largely the same in the first two stories, since they both use informal sentence structure and prose, are

fairly brief, refer to pictures and contain backstories about found objects and a very similar ending sentence –a concise, otherworldly gesture of belief or knowledge about the subject.

Both are, perhaps only coincidentally, about siblings as well. However, in the first story, the author finds a profound note from a sister to a brother who has died. In the second story, the found object is less personal –a religious light owned by the author's brother, which received distinctly less social interaction. While there are some similarities in the third post (essay style, reference to images, a similar ending), there is a distinct difference with a more formal sentence structure, a longer backstory, more description and a different relationship examined (lost and found loves rather than siblings).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of
one user across three posts

Post date	Views	Loves	Narrative *vs.* Non-Narrative	Picture type	Relationship	Formal *vs.* Informal
Aug. 25	2657	394 (378 over average)	Non-narrative	Found object (refers to in story)	Siblings	Informal
Sept. 7	50	16 (On average)	Non-narrative	Found object (refers to in story)	Siblings	Informal
Sept. 8	58	26 (10 over average)	Non-narrative	Natural object (refers to in the story)	Lost loves	Formal

Source: Author.

Despite an author's motivations being impossible to detect through ECA, the patterns of content, especially those that show few psychologically revealing stories, all point to the interpretation that Cowbird writers are largely seeking a connection with others via an offline rendering of self through a willingness to eschew formal narrative structures by performing self-rhetorical strategies and a frugality in cues. In addition, there is no distinct bifurcation between author and reader; most users act as both. Nevertheless, one possible interpretation of the findings is that many users take on the role of "author" even when they are reading, perhaps spending the "loves" more frugally, considering a combination of factors

that might not be found on another site. One small confirmation of this concept is the site's engagement by calling each user an "author", and the affordance for users to take on a "role" of their choosing, being "author", "artist", "storyteller" and "thinker" among the top 10.

It is evident that performing the self as transmediated story comes in many shapes and sizes, but with the overwhelming need for connection. Moreover, the permissions to create those connections –loves, comments, retellings– are frugally given in the space. Thus, the act of transmediating the self through their story could mean doing so without a great deal of attention or positive feedback. This leaves the user with a decision to engage mostly outwardly by finding strategies for drawing attention, or inwardly, by focusing on an authentic connection through genuine transmediation. There is a range within those two poles and it is also possible that the right kind of genuine self-depiction will more readily cross from offline to online acceptance.

Discussion and Limitations

While life storytelling has proven to be a useful insight window into the human condition, this study suggests that the understanding of a story and its transmediation into digital space should be expanded. When people are left to their own devices, "life story" appears to cue less a set of rules of what constitutes a narrative and more as an unrestricted reference to the self. On one hand, the forms in which the self could be expressed on the Cowbird site in 2012 were widely varied, and they seem to focus on making connections, expressing opinions and reflecting on one's life. This does not mean, though, that Cowbird users were willing to release the author or storyteller titles along with the form widely defined as "story". On the other hand, a large group did in fact use classical narrative forms, perhaps as a strategy to be understood and engaged on a site that privileges the story.

The limitations of this research are the data set, which should be expanded both with human coding and some computer-assisted analysis of tags, roles, social engagement and other manifest aspects of the content. My own preconceived notions about what constitutes a story, as well as McAdams' codes, could also confound my findings. While I attempted to be diligent in following definitions provided by theorists

of this field, my own biases and perspectives played a role in my coding. These limitations tempered my conclusions, but they do not negate the future research possibilities these findings imply, both for Cowbird and other social media sites.

What can be said most confidently is that life stories have different meanings under different contexts. What we tell ourselves, what we tell our closest confidantes and what we say in public spaces, especially without knowing who might be listening, are not always the same. How these transmediated stories emerge and submerge in those contexts, especially around digital sociality, is a rich field for ongoing research. With the emergence of communication affordances that allow us to publicly document our lives, a deep understanding of public life storytelling, and how it impacts our identities, is crucial.

The next major step for transmedia research is to examine how a life, or lives, moves across digital platforms. This study focused on what might be considered the initial step of transmedia, from offline to online, and represents Elwell (2014) theoretical move. Eventhough, we know that transmedia is also concerned with the transitional nature of media across platforms, as well as with how people's engagement shapes and reshapes the story. This could certainly be the case for the offline-online personae and their life narratives, as they move from platform to platform. Such a study could be possible by interacting with social media users who shape their digital presence under common usernames, which may or may not match their offline names, and displaying recognizable profile images (if not the exact same) across many platforms. Knowing that each social platform, much life Cowbird, offers idiosyncratic affordances, prompts and primes, as well as its own social ecosystems, and watching how individual personae life narratives hold and change, could tell us much about what it means to be a stories self in digital life.

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